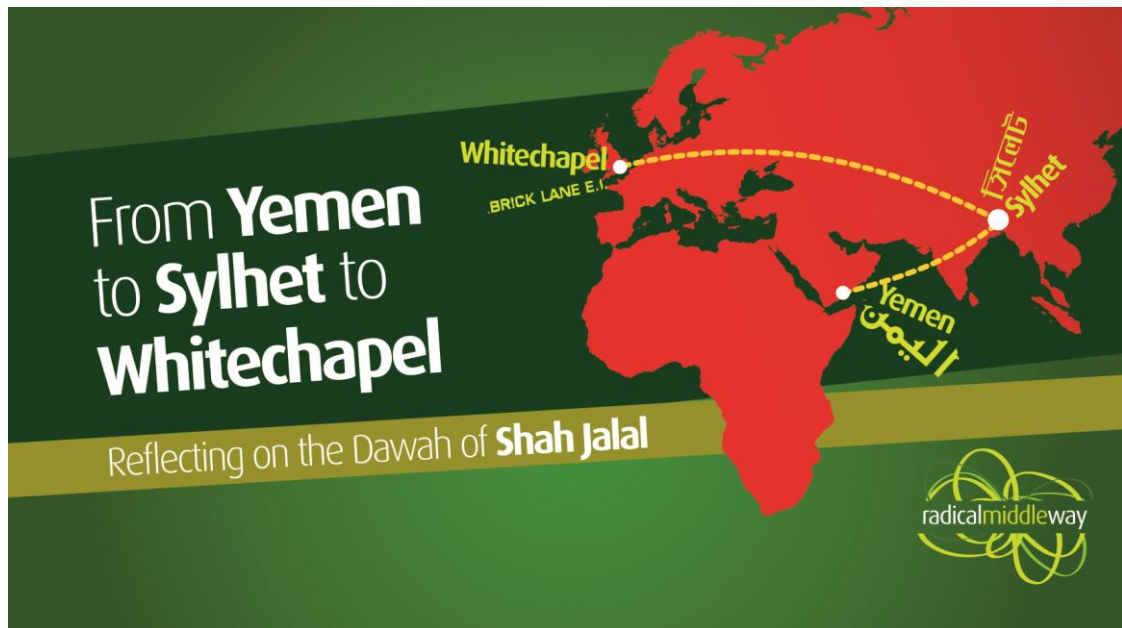


Radical Middle Way Transcripts



**Habib Ali al-Jifri on:
From Hadhramaut to Sylhet to Whitechapel: Reflecting on the
Da'wah of Shah Jalal**

London, 8th May, 2008

Al-salam ‘alaykum wa rahmat Allahi wa barakatuhu

I ask my brothers at Islamic Relief to fill a form for me to give one hundred pounds donation a year and also so the world sees that Muslims help the world, help other people, but also so that the All Seeing, the All Hearing and the All Knowing sees us doing what He has asked us to do, which is helping all of humanity and all of creation.

Glory be to God, He who chooses amongst His servants those that He wills, and guides those that turn to Him. Blessings and peace be upon he who was sent as a mercy to the World, our Messenger, Muhammad sallallahu ‘alayhi wa sallem. The words of Mawlana Jalal Al-Din in his biography, were recently commented on by an intellectual who had read the biography. It’s not just about a man who learned and acted upon what he knew. And nor is it just about a man who changed an entire nation, and brought them into the light believing ‘there is no other god but God.’ It’s the story of this great man, Mawlana Jalal Al-Din, a man who was chosen by his Creator, and the interaction of the man chosen by his Creator, with his Creator. Most of you can understand what the second part of the sentence means. It’s about a man who knew how to deal with his Creator, Glory be to Him.

But one may be left asking himself ‘have I been chosen by God, just as Jalal Al-Din was chosen by God?’ This kind of concept, in its outset, is to do with the unseen. But this unseen thing has outward sights. And the place where the sun shines the most is your heart. If you want to know if God will choose you like he chose his chosen he beloved ones or not, then look at your heart. Does your heart get moved when the people chosen by God get mentioned? Does your heart incline to those that God chooses? Does your heart get filled with wanting from Allah or coveting from Allah that He chooses you also? If you see these signs or some of them, then it is the introduction of the beginning of selection. Like the Arabs say, birds of a feather flock together. So if you see your heart moved with the people of divine election, then it is a sign that you are one of those people.

One of the companions came to the Messenger of Allah, and said *‘I’ve travelled through the night, I am parched of thirst, and my ride is tired and fatigued, and it was just because I wanted to reach you before you leave this world, and ask you a question.’* He said, *‘what is it you want to ask me about?’* he replied *‘oh Messenger of God, what is the sign of God in the people He chooses, and what is the sign of God in the people He doesn’t choose?’* So the Messenger of God said to him *‘how did you wake up in the morning?’*

The man was asking a question to the Prophet about divine election, and the Prophet’s question to the man was ‘how did you wake up’ as his question.

The man said *‘I’ve woken up living goodness and joyous from any goodness that I do, and saddened by any goodness that I miss.’*

The Prophet said *‘this is enough for you. This is the sign in those He wants. If He had wanted you for anything else He would have prepared you for the other thing. So you doing the actions that prepare you for being chosen by God are like a herald from God saying ‘come, come, I’m going to choose you.’* On the other side is the love of the people chosen by God because like the Hadith says, a man is with those he

loves. Therefore we love Mawlana Jalal Al-Din, and our hearts are moved when Mawlana Jalal Al-Din is mentioned. And it makes me happy when I know many of the young people here have visited the grave of Mawlana Jalal Al-Din. Because the Prophet (saw) said a man is with those he loves.

So in this biography we're talking about the journey of a divine election for a servant, and the journey of that servant in being sincere and earnest in his dealings with his creator.

The title of this talk is 'From Yemen to Sylhet to Whitechapel'. But there is a place before Yemen – Medina. The lights of Islam flooded out of Medina. Upon the one who lives in it and resides in it may there be the best of blessings and best of peace be bestowed. And the people of Yemen entered Islam with one letter from the Messenger of God, without one drop of blood being shed.

Seyyidna 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib and Seyyidna Mu'aad Ibn Jabal both went to call the people of Yemen to Islam. One of them lived in the furthest north of Yemen and one of them lived in the furthest south of Yemen, and between them the entire people of Yemen entered Islam. As generations passed, people kept coming to Yemen from amongst the people chosen by God. Until the fourth generation after the Hijra until the member of the Prophetic House, Ahmed ibn 'Isa Al-Muhajir, the one travelled and migrated for the sake of God, who was a direct descendent of Seyyidna Hussain, came to Yemen. He settled in Hadhramaut and established a methodology. Many missions started from Hadhramaut to all the corners of the Earth. The map of the world began to change. Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore entered Islam at the hands of people who came out of Yemen. Many countries from East Africa, among them Kenya, where Dr. Fu'ad was born, entered Islam at the hands of the people who came out of Yemen.

There are two narrations of the story of Mawlana Jalal Al-Din. According to one, he came out of Yemen to go towards Mecca. He spent time in Mecca and Medina, then he moved towards Turkey, then towards Persia and from Persia he crossed over into the lands that, at that time, were known as the Lands of Bengal.

According to the second narration, his father migrated from Yemen to Turkey and that he grew up in Turkey with his father. Then he travelled to Damascus or which is presently Syria, and he took from a Shaykh – a Shaykh called Shaykh Akbar. Now, that would explain the name because Akbar is not an Arab name. But what is probably intended is the Shaykh Al-Akbar, the greatest Shaykh. This was the title for one of the great scholars of Islam. And then he moved from there to the Lands of Bengal.

Some of the history books said that this is an historical or academic lecture, but some history books have three versions of the story of Jalal Al-Din. Some say he's Persian, but this is a very weak narration. The reason for this confusion is that the great explorer, Ibn Batuta, when he was travelling in his journey Eastwards, he diverted his journey especially to visit Mawlana Jalal Al-Din in Sylhet. If you read properly the writings of Ibn Batuta, you will see that when he was travelling, he always looked to meet the men who transformed the locality and places they lived in. He reached the place where Mawlana Jalal Al-Din lived and towards the end of Mawlana Jalal Al-Din's life. And that is why he found him in a cave, as he mentions in his travel logs. But he called him Jalal Al-Din Al-Tabrizi. Some of the 'Ulama who really go into

the history and the details have said that the reason he has called him Jalal Al-Din Al-Tabrizi is because of a confusion that occurred between him and another 'Alim who was called Jalal Al-Din Al-Tabrizi (Al-Tabrizi is a place in modern day Iran) who lived a few miles from where Shah Jalal Al-Din was, but there was a hundred years between that Jalal Al-Din Al-Tabrizi and Ibn Batuta.

Another narration is that Mawlana Jalal Al-Din was Turkish, but the more vigorous and authentic one is that he is from Yemen.

Mawlana Hasan has already given the evidence, so I don't want to re-discuss it – the effect of language of Sylhet, the effect on the appearance of the people because of the Arab blood that was amongst them, so I don't want to go into that again. People will just say 'he's Yemeni; he just wanted that man to be Yemeni also!'

Perhaps the fact that the actual journey – the route- that Mawlana Jalal Al-Din took, answers the question anyway; he travelled through Turkey, then Iran and into Baghdad. But the thing of importance to us all is Mawlana Jalal Al-Din took knowledge from great Imams. So therefore those people, whose souls long and yearn to be chosen by God, should seek knowledge. And take it from its real people. Mawlana Jalal Al-Din used to have three chains of transmission for each Hadith that he would cite. The first type of chain was the actual chain of transmission, so he would say 'so and so said to me, that so and so said to them, that so and so said to them, all the way back to the Messenger of God (saw)'.

The other sanad is called the chain of understanding the Hadith, so he'd say to me 'so and so said to me this, and so and so said to me that we can take this meaning from this, and so and so who realised what it meant said to me it means this.'

The third sanad of the chains of transmission is of spiritual purification – the chain of transmission that you call in the east the chain of transmission taken from a Murshid. Meaning that he took the chain of purification of the soul and how to expose the false inherent, and to self, to correct it and rectify it – took it from someone who knew them and took them directly to the Messenger of God. If to find people who can give you this is difficult, then the one to do is at least one to give you a chain of knowledge going back.

Whilst taking a chain of scholarship going back to the Messenger of God, turn in humility to God and ask Him to show you the way to someone who can show you the way to God, and to pray and send salutations to the Prophet. For some have said that a salutation on the Prophet is the teacher of one who has no Shaykh. Because for one blessing said upon the Prophet, Allah sends down ten for us. As it says in the Qur'an, it is God and His Angels that send blessings upon you to take you out of the darkness and into the light.

The other thing is that when Mawlana Jalal Al-Din was travelling on his way to Sylhet, he stopped at places where Saints, Scholars and Righteous men resided. Mawlana Hasan mentioned Nidham Al-Din and Mu'een Al-Din Al-Jishti, may God have mercy upon them. This is a sign for me and you that live in this country. When Mawlana Jalal Al-Din had reached the subcontinent and India he was already a scholar and a knower of God, and for what we know, already a saint. Why then, if he is already a saint, why is he seeking these people out?

There are two lessons to be learnt from this. One of the lessons is that no matter how far the believer ascends in his faith, he is always in need of good companionship, and good companionship is like the pouring of water. The people who keep each other's company who are good souls pour water from each other's souls into each other's souls. So they feed each other, they quench each other.

Us here, in New Sylhet, you should look around you for people who are good companions for you. He also knew that these were men of knowledge, righteousness; these were knowers of God and godly men who had already established themselves and settled in these lands. They already knew the typography and background of the people, so he could learn from them about their experience with these people. So he did shura – he asked them for their council – on where to go in that region, even though he had already taken knowledge from his own Shaykhs in his country. We take knowledge from any of the Shaykhs of Islam, no matter where their country is, as long as they have gained their knowledge in an authentic way. But to understand da'wah, or call to God, in the country you are in, we need to refer back to the people who are honest and earnest in the country that we are doing da'wah in.

Yesterday when we were at Canary Wharf, I heard Shaykh Abdul Hakim speaking and the words he was saying were like gems. I was picking from those gems and learning so much from what he was saying. I began to feel that the words he was saying and the means he was using to say it were what were needed in this country; he's from the people of this country, and he's a Muslim, a scholar and is godly. God has told us Himself, that he sends every messenger with the tongue, the language of his people. Even though the Prophets are infallible and they are supported by the Angels. But despite that the prophecy needs them to speak the tongue of their people.

So the guidance he received on how to speak to these people, were on the guidance of those Imams. So they directed him from that place, and I don't think it would be farfetched that he also received direction from his heart. Because the believer takes istishara – which is guidance from other people, and istikhara – which is asking God which path to choose. So that he does not take one step forward without the light of inspiration for success of God's presence Himself.

When Mawlana Jalal Al-Din reached Sylhet – and subhan Allah – they say that each person or thing has a portion of its name – and if you look at Sylhet, it's very close to salihat, which means to be rectified; when he came into it, it was rectified. Shah Jalal had 360 of his mureeds or disciples who took knowledge from him. This is a lesson for us also, because these were the people Allah used to spread Islam to all the points of the Bengal. Therefore, when we find someone in our area who calls to God, we should gather around him.

Mawlana Jalal Al-Din didn't start off as a fighter in the most authentic translations. The basis of our faith is peace. Even when the Muslims struggle and do jihad of fighting, it's in order to remove harm and injustice for the establishment of peace. The reason is peace. The P saw born in Mecca. For 13 years he suffered, he was persecuted, he was tortured – him and his followers – at the hands of the disbelievers around him, yet they all suffered it. All he used to say to them was 'let me talk to the people.' Meaning that he was willing to withstand the hand that was coming to him, let them continue, as long as he could speak to the people. God gave

him permission to fight and avert the hand that was coming to him for a period of five years. And in the sixth year, the pledge of peace, of Hudaibiya was written. And the Prophet (saw) accepted the pact of Hudaibiya, even though on the apparent side of it, it appeared to degrade the rights of, and insult the Muslims.

Seyyidna 'Omar ibn Al-Khattab said to the Prophet (saw) *'how can we be fine with a lowly in our religion? Aren't our dead in the garden and their dead in the fire? How can we agree to such a thing?'* to the point that Seyyidna 'Omar was so troubled by this that the Prophet was signing to, he said *'are you not the Messenger of Allah, really?'* so the Prophet (saw) struck Seyyidna 'Omar on his chest and said *'oh 'Omar, I am the Messenger of God.'*

'So why do we agree to this?'

'Because this is the command of God'

In every age there are people like 'Omar in this Ummah. The important thing is that no matter how angry 'Omar gets, or he wants to take things by force, at the end of the day he will listen to the command of the Prophet of God.

And after they made the pledge of Hudaibiya, and they went away, God revealed to them the beginning of Surat Al-Fat-h, *'And we have truly given you a manifest victory.'*

The Prophet (saw) said *'Bring 'Omar and let him hear this verse.'*

'Is it a victory of the Messenger of God?'

The Prophet (saw) said, *'it is a victory, oh 'Omar'*

Because peace reigned in the Arabian Peninsula, because of this pledge – this peace treaty between the Muslims and the non-Muslims, the Prophet was able for those two years to send messages out to the rest of the Peninsula and to different parts of the area. And in those two years, more people entered Islam than in the nineteen years before.

When the non-believers broke the pledge and started attacking the Prophet of Allah, the Prophet fought them back. When Mawlana Jalal Al-Din entered Sylhet, he entered as a caller to God. He used to call to God using three things:

- Through his speech, with which he would tell people about the faith
- Through his character, with which people saw his generosity and kindness, even though he didn't have many means – he wasn't a wealthy man.
- The third thing is something we are completely heedless of when we are trying to call to God, he used to call people to God through the spiritual status he had in front of God. His heart was filled with mercy to people. Forgiveness, pardon, forbearance, love of goodness for creation, concern for peoples affairs, he enjoined on his followers to marry the women of Sylhet, from the people who had converted to Islam. And through these bonds of intermarriage, the society became interlocked.

And here I say something to the brothers. If the Mawlana Jalal Al-Din followers treated the women as we treat them today, do you think Islam would have spread so fast in Sylhet?

When the Prophet (saw) was on his death bed, he gave the Muslims two pieces of advice: *'Prayer', and 'by God, by God and the Women. I tell you to advise people to just be good to the women.'*

He also said *'the best of you is the best to his family, and I am the best of you to his family.'*

So the measure of one's closeness to God and one's goodness is seen in our treatment of our women.

The man who thinks manliness is to break the woman, and stand over her as an overload (that he understands this to mean men have one degree over women) then that man has not understood what manhood is or his faith. He has not understood his manhood or his faith.

Do any of you think yourself manlier than the Prophet of God? Anyone here?

There is no Muslim that does that, because if anyone does think that of the Prophet of God, then he is an apostate.

Where is he going to run? The master of men, peace and blessings be upon him, differs in his apparent expression in his dealings with Seyyida 'A'isha. There is no difference in the heart, but there is a difference in the appearance, so that he could teach the people. He differed with Seyyida 'A'isha, and she got angry. So the Prophet (saw) said, *'how about this, we bring your father and let him judge over us?'* Who is going to judge over whom? Seyyidna Abu Bakr Al-Sadiq would not be anything if it were not for the Messenger of Allah. So Seyyidna Abu Bakr comes.

Now, look at this. Think about the subtlety and kindness with which he deals with Seyyidna 'A'isha. The Prophet says to Seyyidna 'A'isha, *'would you like to talk first or should I talk first?'* so his understanding of manhood was not, 'I start talking and not give her any leeway to speak, and that's it – that's the end of everything'. She says *'you speak first, but don't say anything but the truth.'*

'Would the Messenger of Allah say anything other than the truth?'

So Seyyidna Abu Bakr raises his hand to strike her, saying *'Oh enemy of your own self, how do you meet the Prophet of Allah with statements such as this?'* And as her father lifted his hands up, she went and hid behind the Messenger of Allah. She's angry with him and yet she's hiding behind him.

There's a message in that.

Even though she's affected by something, she knows his mercy in the depths of her heart from the Prophet's dealings with her.

May the sisters forgive me, but when women get angry sometimes, they lose their balance in their dealings with people.

But why did you become, in the presence of God, a man who presides over her? Because of your muscles? Because your tongue is bigger than hers? Because you strike her? That's not a man – a man who strikes a woman like that is not a man.

He's not a man.

I repeat again, he's not a man.

So, Seyyidna 'A'isha hid behind the Prophet (saw), as he said *'oh no Abu Bakr, we did not bring you here for this, we brought you here to reconcile between us.'*

Sadly, we mistreat women in the name of religion. Some men think that since they start growing a long beard, and start having the appearance of the Sunnah, it's wrong for him to start treating his wife properly. Nay, he thinks that to be gentle with his wife, or joke with his wife or be humorous with his wife, is degrading for him. Do you know that the Prophet of God used to race with Seyyida 'A'isha? Seyyida 'A'isha was only eighteen years old when the Prophet of God passed away, but she lived on full of the meanings that the Prophet had instilled in her, she needed nothing more. She's the one that spoke about these situations.

She narrates a story with the Prophet of God, saying *'I was travelling with the Prophet of God and he could see on my face that I was tired and fatigued by my travel, so he told the people to 'go ahead, as we also have this thing called modesty and courtesy. Some people think that to be gentle means to put your arms around your wife in the market place, or kiss her in public. We have our own courtesies. This is not part of it.'* It was not part of modesty for people to hear him joking with his wife. The modesty was in the heart of Seyyidna 'A'isha, my brothers and sisters. She knew it would be unbecoming for her to come out in front of strangers.

She continues to narrate; *'He said to them 'go ahead'. After there was a distance between us and the other travellers, he turned to me; may my mother and father be ransomed to him,'* she said.

It has been said in the books that describe the Prophet (saw) that whenever he turned to somebody, he turned in his totality. So he turned to her and said *'Oh 'A'isha, would you like to run with me? Do you want to race with me?'* She said she found it strange to be travelling and he say this, but she said *'Yes! Oh Messenger of Allah.'* He said to her, *'go on, start.'*

She said she beat him.

She said, *'A few years later, I put on more weight. We travelled again and he asked me again, 'A'isha, do you want to race against me?' So I said yes, and he (saw) beat me that time. He turned to me and said 'A'isha, this one is for the other time.'* He said to me *'I still remember all those years I had with you, and all those gentle moments we've shared together.'*

Sometimes, us men, because of our gravity, we see these little things as being minor, or trivial, but if we just remember those things, we see they carry a big meaning for all.

To tell a woman (your wife) that what she is wearing is really beautiful on her, or to tell her how nice her food is, or to tell her *'remember that thing you cooked a few months ago – that was really nice.'* Tell her that you remember all those moments you have shared with her.

Some of us, if his wife said to him, 'I'm a bit tired, get up and start sweeping the floor' you'd say, 'ha.' Do you think it belittles your manhood to get up and start cleaning? 'I'm a man, how can I get up and start sweeping the floor?' The master of men, and your master - some of the companions asked 'A'isha about him and how he was amongst them in the house, in private. Because the companions were awestruck by the presence of the Messenger of God, and they wondered how the wives, who were also awestruck by him, managed to live with him. So Seyyida 'A'isha said *'he was like one of us. He would milk the animal himself. He'd carry the water vessel. And he'd sweep the floor of the house. And he'd repair his own sandals. And he'd be in the service of his family. Except at the time when the prayer was called. When the prayer was called he would stand up as if we did not know him and he did not know us.'*

It saddens me that when I say these words, they are strange to some of our brothers and sisters. It saddens me that when people not from the East, hear these words they look at us and think 'why do they find that strange, it's not a big deal.' It's true.

What kind of image have we given to Islam? Mawlana Jalal Al-Din is here, isn't he? Yes? You are Mawlana Jalal Al-Din. You are amongst the good deeds of Mawlana Jalal Al-Din. You are the fruits of the works of Mawlana Jalal Al-Din. Take some of the meanings you have heard, and live them here. Our treatment of the women, our treatment of others. It is wrong to think that by brandishing a sword he was able to convince people to enter into Islam.

God says to the Prophet (saw) in the Qur'an *'Do you attempt to coerce the people to believe?'* Mawlana Jalal Al-Din would gather the people around him and who had entered the faith, to remember God. The earth would shake because of their remembrance of God. Mercy would descend on the Earth because of these sessions of remembrance. This mercy and serenity that would descend would enter the hearts of people who didn't believe, and bring them to Islam. There are people around you who are not Muslims, is that true? How much rain have you tried to call down from the Heavens for them? Mawlana Jalal Al-Din tired and exhausted himself. Yes the stories differ. Some say he went to the Sultan's palace and he said 'Allahu Akbar' and the Sultan's palace shook.

Some doubt it.

I believe that.

How? Mawlana Jalal Al-Din's call to God began with a peaceful call, and huge numbers of people began to enter Islam. When people started flocking in huge numbers to his call, some of the Hindu priests in the area didn't like it because it was harming them. Not because they saw it as religion, rather they saw somebody questioning their authority. So they went to the ruler to make him scared of what Mawlana Jalal Al-Din was trying to do. And there are still people with very narrow visions and very narrow agendas who go to the Sultan of your time, of your context and try to scare him about your intentions. They go to the rulers and say the Muslims are going to spoil the country.

So back to the story, that Sultan got angry and decided to either exile Mawlana Jalal Al-Din from his country or he's going to kill him. So news came to Mawlana Jalal Al-

Din that the sultan was angry with him; he went to the Sultan to explain it to him, and to call him to God. He found the Sultan standing there with his foot soldiers. He found that the Sultan's ears were plugged up – he didn't want to hear anything. Or listen to him saying what he has to say. Nor did he treat him with any good character. So there only remained the third choice, of the three things we said were needed for da'wah: your state with God – your spirituality. But the spirituality that manifest in the Sultan's palace was not born at that moment, because the night before when fajr came, he wasn't still sleeping.

God says in the Qur'an, *'A little of the night they slept, and pre-dawn they turned to God and seek forgiveness. And the salves of the All Merciful who wake gently and when addressed by the ignorant, they say 'peace be upon you.'* They spent their nights in prayers and prostration. This is where miracles are born. How do they walk? They walk gently upon the Earth, because people of Miracles are people of humility. They are not people of arrogance. They don't consider the miracles that happen at their hands to be something to be proud of, or that make them better than people. In the descriptions of the Prophet it says that he would gaze and ponder at the Earth more than he would do at the Heavens, because of his humility.

So first they are people who walk gently on the earth because they are people of humility. When people who are ignorant address them, they say 'peace.' How many people have wronged you, whilst you go about your daily business – at work or at home – they have wronged you because of their ignorance? Many. But did you say peace? When they were addressed by ignorant people, they said 'peace.'

At that time, the Sultan didn't want to hear him speak, or see the goodness of his character; the Sultan prepared his battle line in front of him. And he directed his soldiers towards Mawlana Jalal Al-Din, who uttered a word. He said a word that sprung forth from his heart and state, not just his mind. He saw the haughtiness and arrogance of the Sultan, the soldiers being prepared and he said 'Allahu Akbar'. In my heart I have experienced nothing greater than the majesty of God. The Palace of the Sultan shook, and the people were left confused and he walked away. The sultan prepared his army to do battle, and he transgressed against him. So Mawlana Jalal Al-Din prepared an army to take on the army the sultan had prepared. And because he was on the side of truth and because he was someone who had been transgressed against, God gave him victory. This is dignity.

After that the country settled and he decided that any fruit bore of his work, should not be credited to him. I say to myself, and the brothers who are organising charities, when we see that God opens hearts in our hands, we shouldn't see that necessarily, as though we have followers. Because the one who expands hearts and opens hearts is God. Not us, not our words, nor our actions. But when God sees our words and some of our good actions, He will accept what we are doing and bring guidance at our hands.

When Mawlana Jalal Al-Din saw that the hearts had turned to God and that Islam was being established in Sylhet, and he saw that his students, and his students' students, had begun to spread Islam throughout the Lands of Bengal, he ran away from any fame. So he answered a longing that was deep in his heart which was a longing to be alone with his Lord. So he went into seclusion and isolation in a cave.

There is no one successful or true in calling people to God, except that inside him, there's a core to be alone with his Maker. He may or may not respond to this call to be with his Maker, depending on whether he sees isolating himself would be beneficial to the faith or not. But none the less, the call is inside. The more a man's heart is elevated through true service through serving God's creatures, the more his heart will have longings to be with his Creator. God said to the Prophet (saw) when the victory of God comes and you see people turning to God in great crowds, then glorify in the praise of your Lord, and seek His forgiveness. Truly He is forgiving.

Mawlana Jalal Al-Din remained in seclusion in his cave worshiping God and people would come to him to receive spiritual guidance. He spent his last days in seclusion.

People such as that man are alive. Because their lives in the interspaces between this world and the next, in their grave, were tied to the way they lived their lives. Even the common parties who died for the sake of God, we are not allowed to call them dead; God says in the Qur'an,

'And do not say about those that died, or were killed, in the way of God, that they are dead. But that they are alive with the Lord, being sustained.'

This man who was a *sadiq*, in the rank of Sainthood, which is an emphatic version of honesty, this is a higher rank of state, even higher than a martyr, according to our understanding.

God, when he speaks about the ranks in the divine presence, He says,
'There amongst those who have the bounty of God upon them, from the Messengers, the Prophets and the sidiqeen, are the martyrs and the righteous.'

I visited Sylhet more than ten years ago. I spent three days there in the Mosque of the Saint, Mawlana Jalal Al-Din during the day I would spend time trying to call people to God and do good service. I felt there was good refinement of the people of Sylhet. The first thing that came to my attention was their humility, and their brokenness of their hearts before the Divine presence. It was easy to feel intimate and close with them, and the Prophet (saw) said, *'a believer is someone you feel close to, and they feel close to other people.'* I also saw that whatever good you told them about, they respond to it quickly.

One of the nights I was sleeping in the mosque and mausoleum of Mawlana Jalal Al-Din, I woke up after midnight. There were eleven of us in the group, and I saw that two of the men were already up. So we did our ablutions and did two rak'ats of prayer in the Mosque. And then we went off to the mausoleum where Mawlana Jalal Al-Din is buried. When I entered I remembered that Seyyida 'A'isha narrated that some nights she would not find the Prophet (saw) asleep in bed, and as she was protective and envious, she wondered where he was. She would find him at the cemetery of Baqiya where some of his Companions who had died as martyrs were buried. I would find him in the middle of the night standing amongst the graves calling God. In some narrations it says he would stand for long periods of time supplicating God and asking God for forgiveness. Our Scholars have told us that the graves are visiting for three things under the Sacred Law: first is to remind you of what the Prophet (saw) said which was *'I stopped you visiting the graves, now I tell you, you should visit them because they remind you of death.'*

When was the last time you visited a Muslim cemetery? A month should not pass by without you visiting, because it enlivens the heart, it brings the heart back to life. So first is to awaken the heart, and remind the heart of the nature of life. The second is to connect: either to connect with your king, who has passed away and lies in a grave, or to rekindle a link of brotherhood in God, or to rekindle a brotherhood in religion, meaning that by rekindling connections with people of great spiritual rank who lay in their graves.

It is narrated that the Prophet (saw) used to visit Uhud, where the Companions were martyred, because of the great rank these people had for being martyred.

The third reason is that to be in a place where mercy is showered on the graves of these saintly people, is to receive a portion of that mercy that is showered upon them. The Prophet (saw) said, *'A person's grave is either a meadow of the meadows of the Garden, or a pit from the pits of the Fire.'*

We do not accept that someone should start circling around a grave – because this is not right – we only circle the Ka'ba. Nor do we pray in the direction of a grave, because we only pray in the direction of the Ka'ba. But we visit, and give salutations, and pray to Allah Almighty, we read from the Qur'an and we send the reward to the soul of the deceased. Many of the great Scholars have said it is permissible to ask for intercession, but to ask Allah to give you the intercession of this person. All of this is permissible.

There is a difference of opinion of the Scholars in their rulings regarding whether it is permissible to turn away from the Qiblah during supplication, and instead face the headstone of the deceased, or turn away from the headstone and face the Qiblah. There is no problem with this. It only becomes blameworthy when someone wants to set it as one opinion only, takes their opinion and reject everyone else's. It could have been possible, if God had wanted it to be so, to have made the ayaat of the Qur'an and the ahadith of the Prophet (saw) were decisive proofs and unambiguous. Take note of this.

But because of a wisdom that God sought, He made it so that many of our sacred texts have more than one meaning to them. This led our Scholars to differ, when each derived different meanings from them; to keep the value of plurality in our religion; in order so that it can encompass the different ages, the different times, the different contexts, the different intellects, the different states of the people. And this is one of the great things about our religion, even in the differences of our historical narratives. Even when we look at the biography of the Prophet, and the differences amongst the Scholars as to how many wives he had, how many battles he fought, the different narrations about the Prophets of God – these all give variation of our religion. You should walk away from here, living the value of the variation in your faith and life. At the same time, it means one should take the opinions of the Scholars who are rigorous in their scholarship, and who derive their opinions from rulings. It means that one should not take from here or there, and not know where he is going.

In any case, you came from Sylhet to this country. And the country awaits the fruits of Sylhet. Perhaps we have prolonged the talk by correlating the events with meanings, but I hope some of those meanings have reached you, and penetrated you so you may live them in your lives.

How many students did Mawlana Jalal-Al-Din have? Three hundred and sixty.

How many people from Sylhet are there in East London?

Do I need to say more or has the message got there?

Three hundred and sixty people brought Islam to the whole of Bengal. And the sixty thousand people of Sylhet who live here, we hope the light of *'la ilaha ila la'* will dawn forth at their house, this country, in sha' Allah. Your hearts are already attached to Mawlana Jalal Al-Din. Now couple those meanings to the man you are attached to, and know that everything that Mawlana Jalal Al-Din did, was poured into him from the reality of the Prophet of God. [Closing du'a with Al-Fatiha]

About Habib Ali al-Jifri

Habib 'Ali Zain Al Abideen Al Jifri was born into a family of noble lineage extending in an unbroken chain to Imam Husayn (ra), the grandson of the Prophet (saw). Habib 'Ali is from the majestic city of Tarim, South Yemen. Nestled in the ancient valley of Hadramawt, Tarim has been a center of learning and spirituality for centuries. Habib 'Ali received a classical Islamic education from the illustrious scholars of Hadramawt, embodying a methodology which crystallizes the middle way of Islam, Islamic Jurisprudence, a respect for the differences between jurists and a spiritual education drawn from the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Habib 'Ali is Founder of the 'Taba Foundation for Islamic Studies and Research' based in the United Arab Emirates. He is also a lecturer at Dar Al Mustafa, Tarim, an educational institute established for the study of traditional Islamic sciences. Habib 'Ali is continually invited to lecture in many countries across the globe and appears regularly on a variety network television and radio programs.

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